

## negotiation

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# negotiation

by [gildedhorns](#)

## Summary

Your chest is cold, a furnace whose chamber is slick with wet, hard to alight even for those who'd wish to feel its warmth.

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Over the years you've learned there's always a sort of predictability in these situations, but the suddenness in which they escalate never ceases to frighten you.

She's not angry (or at least you don't think she's angry) but she's flush with your body, and this time her hands have found their way up to your throat. They're wrapped all the way around, thumbs pressing, fingertips meeting at the back and you're calculating just how much she'd want you to struggle, or if she'd want you to struggle at all, or if you actually physically *can*, when you realize she's not letting up and it's been a rather long time when a voice at the back of your mind whispers:

*you're going to die*

(in and of itself this isn't a surprising thing – if you were to die she *would* be the one to kill you – it's just not supposed to be happening here and now)

Your chest is rising but there's nothing coming in and the subsequent light-headedness is enough to make that voice repeat itself, this time with a slightly hysterical edge.

*you're going to die*

*you're going to die*

*you're going to suffocate to death and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it*

Even through the fog of panic this strikes part of you as technically untrue – you are very strong after all, maybe not as strong as she is but your hands are free and you think that if you wanted to you could reach up and grab her wrists and-

*no*

*never an option*

*(she'll be angry)*

*more importantly*

*the plan-*

*she'll suspect*

But the corners of your vision tinge with black, extinguishing any room for argument and leaving you with a very simple choice. If you die there will be no plan for her *to* suspect, and if you die the world will be left at her mercy.

In the end the relative ease of the action surprises you - you grasp her wrists and push away (with enough force to come across as confident but not so much as to seem desperate). Oxygen fills your lungs and you're hit with a wave of dizziness.

Ragyo's expression is inscrutable and you feel the beginnings of regret creep up within you.

(stupid)

(you would've only passed out)

(you needn't have done that. you've risked everything)

(say something)

"My body isn't as strong as yours, mother." You sound like Hououmaru. *You scamp.*

"No, it's not." Her voice is slow and thoughtful, but holds no apology for the marks that bloom around your throat as she speaks.

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When you return to your quarters, Soroi has the good sense to put honey and lemon in your tea. Tomorrow he'll select a high collared shirt for you to wear as part of your ensemble, but in the privacy of your quarters a loose camisole is enough. The squeak of Soroi's trolley interrupts your thoughts and you're confronted with bowls of puréed vegetables, soup, risotto and the like. You glance at up at him wryly, picking up a spoon and stirring the mush experimentally.

"Do you take me for an infant."

"No, my lady."

Your remark comes out colder than intended, but for some reason you don't tell him that. The purée tastes better than you had anticipated, which admittedly isn't saying much considering how it looks. The cartilage of your throat crackles in your ears every time you swallow.

When you're done Soroi takes longer than usual to clear up. You can see the anxiety in the line of his shoulders, and you can tell he wants to say something.

"There's no need to worry, Soroi."

"Of course not, my lady." He pauses in his dish collection. "Did you have a fight with Mistress Ragyo?"

"No."

Soroi's expression is as professionally impassive as ever but his disbelief is palpable.

"She wasn't angry as far as I could tell. She was just -" You shrug and gesture.

"Would you like me to fetch a physician?"

You swallow experimentally. "I don't think that's necessary."

Soroi nods, knowing you're being honest in your assessment. You're proud, but not foolish.

"For a moment I thought she was going to kill me. You know how she talks sometimes. I thought she was going to make good on her words."

"My lady, forgive me for speaking so freely but - what will you do if - next time - she doesn't have the mind to stop? The plan, will you?"

"She *will* stop. I told her to stop, and she did."

Soroi was taken aback, "She listened?"

"Even people such as her have their limits, I suppose."

You think maybe this should be the cause of some relief, or at least less worry, but the apprehension in the old man's face doesn't change and a heavy weight settles in the pit of your stomach.

Soroi must sense you're done talking because he resumes gathering up the rest of the dinnerware, while you absentmindedly trace lines around the curve of your throat.

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You don't see her after that until many months later in the throes of a corporate party. She's just returned from flying around the world on business while you've been staying in Japan, hands full with Honnouji. As always, circumstances align themselves and you find yourself obligated to make an appearance alongside her. Investors, businessmen and warlords alike are all predictably struck by your brilliance. They bow so low their snouts scrape the ground, and spill exaltations at your feet like so many pigs lined up at a trough.

"Miss Kiryuin you've matured into a gorgeous young lady-"

"*Gorgeous-*"

"Just as radiant as her mother-"

The mother in question flashes you a crystalline smile. She's positively bubbly, and you can't help but notice her spider-like hands aren't bedecked in their usual artificial talons. She's had several glasses of champagne and you wonder if the stuff affects her body at all, or if she just uses it as an excuse to act more forward than she typically does.

As usual her body language brooks no room for negotiation, and her hands are insistent. You shiver as your skin hits the open air while she bemoans your newfound propensity for men's clothing. There's a familiar thrill of fear that accompanies the gooseflesh and the fingers as they travel down into the elastic waistline of your underwear.

The frustratingly tactless voice you'd last heard in your mind months ago voices pipes up again.

*(Tell her to stop.)*

(What?)

*(Take her wrist. You did it before, what's stopping you from doing it again?)*

(That was different. I had no choice.)

*(And now you do?)*

“Satsuki.”

You nearly startle. Ragyo looks at you with something akin to mirth playing on her lips.

“You’re preoccupied.”

“Forgive me, mother.”

She smiles. “Always so serious,” she lays a hand on your chest, pushing you downwards, “you need to learn to relax.”

You nod and lay back, the duvet and pillows coming up around you. Her fingers continue their journey downwards and you make no move to displace your own hands stretched out high in their spot above your head.

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In whatever little downtime you have between governing your student council, and hammering Honnouji into a weapon that might befit your needs, you find your mood has grown sluggish. Not that you’re usually prone to outbursts of cheer, but you don’t think you’re the joyless steel queen your enemies have made you out to be. Nonon’s snark has been known to elicit smiles, as have Gamagoori’s over-the-top displays of loyalty, but you find that even reactions such as those don’t come so easily anymore.

Your chest is cold, a furnace whose chamber is slick with wet, hard to alight even for those who’d wish to feel its warmth. Making it through day by day is tiresome work, slogging through unmapped mire with no end in sight. Your visits to the mansion are few and far between seeing as you’ve a host of new responsibilities, but when they do come the Revocs CEO makes sure to focus her interests singularly on you.

*Purity? Is there anything about you that's pure?*

You know the transfer student doesn’t know of what she speaks but the depth of her ignorance doesn’t make the words grate any less.

Wearing Junketsu doesn’t seem to be especially helping either. The malevolent kamui pushes your will to its limit, pressing at the seams of your mind, and leaving you raw as an open nerve in its wake.

“You know I don’t enjoy it, right Soroi?”

He hands you a plush towel with which you pat yourself down. Wearing the kamui is physically and mentally taxing, and a hot shower usually relieves some of the former discomfort.

“My lady?”

You slip into a bathrobe, one arm then the next. From its glass prison you can see Junketsu staring at you out of the corner of your eye.

“The things that woman does to me. You know I don’t enjoy it.”

There’s a beat and then, solemn and heavy, “Of course not, my lady.”

You nod. The teacup clinks against the side of the saucer as you raise it.

There’s a pause and Soroi is kneeling down on one knee at your feet, giving you a strange look. “Is everything all right my lady? You’ve been over-exerting yourself ever since you’ve started wearing that...thing.”

You shake your head.

“It’s nothing I am incapable of handling.”

But the butler doesn’t move from his place on the ground, and you are reminded that not all those who wish to know your mind are like Junketsu, looking to exploit and to dominate. And you think that maybe it wouldn’t be so bad to speak your thoughts out loud; to shine a light on the darkness that had made its home in your heart.

“I wonder sometimes...if my silence encourages her. If I could have - should be doing more to dissuade her.”

“My lady - the things she does – they’re not your fault.”

“And yet I give myself so freely one could be forgiven for thinking otherwise.” You don’t look at him, choosing to focus on the teacup and saucer clasped in your hands instead.

“My lady, please don’t think of yourself in such a way.”

He doesn’t receive an answer.

Frowning deeply, the butler offers his hand out in front of you, and you take it, knowing he won’t otherwise. Slowly, he intones, “In anything she does, have you ever known her to take no for an answer? Or for her not to use force the few times she does?”

You swallow, throat bobbing, and squeeze his hand. There are tears in your eyes, hot and frustrated.

“Of course not.”

You’ve known that. You’ve always known that. When did you ever start believing otherwise?

The tears that have sprung up start to roll down your cheeks in tracks. Soroi lets go of your hands and pulls a handkerchief from his breast pocket. You take it, pressing it to your eyes, and grit your teeth against the fabric to stopper up any noise. When you're done and your cheeks are scrubbed dry you hand it back.

"Thank you, Soroi."

"Please don't mention it, my lady."

Soroi eventually takes his leave for the night, leaving you alone with your thoughts. Sniffing, you take up the cup and saucer you had set aside moments before your episode. You take a sip of the amber liquid, frowning when you find it's gone cold.



## End Notes

despite wanting to, there was no satisfying or happy way to wrap up this fic, given it's content and the place in the narrative it's situated in. it's just doing your best to keep your head above the water.

thanks for reading.

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